

## IN-DEPTH ANALYSIS of *THE FOX* by D. H. LAWRENCE

The task of my in-depth analysis is to compare the study carried out in class with my personal interpretation of D. H. Lawrence's *The Fox*.

### A. ANALYSIS

The analysis of the short story carried out in class was focused on two main themes: the perception of the war and the role of women during the conflict.

#### THE PERCEPTION OF THE WAR

The first step of the analysis consisted in the collection of every references to war the reader can come across in the text. Data collection was necessary since in *The Fox* the war is not the central theme but the background of the story. Therefore, in order to outline an overview, the reader has to gather the textual references to war from different perspectives.

##### Data collection of textual references

- 1 . *War conditions, again, were very unfavourable to poultry-keeping. Food was scarce and bad. And when the Daylight Saving Bill was passed, the fowls obstinately refused to go to bed as usual, about nine o'clock in the summer-time. (p. 2)*
- 2 . *Since the war the fox was a demon. (p. 2)*
- 3 . *a young soldier, with his heavy kit on his back, advanced into the dim light. (p. 6)*
- 4 . *The young man--or youth, for he would not be more than twenty--now advanced and stood (p. 6)*
- 5 . *Having his heavy sack on his shoulders (p. 7)*
- 6 . *seeing something boyish (p. 7)*
- 7 . *'Well--from Salonika really.' (p. 8)*
- 8 . *'Ay,' said the youth. 'We've seen enough of rifles.' (p. 8)*
- 9 . *Rapidly and carelessly she prepared the meal, cutting large chunks of bread and margarine--for there was no butter. She racked her brain to think of something else to put on the tray--she had only bread, margarine, and jam, and the larder was bare. (p.9)*
- 10 . *'There's nothing but bread and jam,' she said. (p. 9)*
- 11 . *He was such a boy. (p. 9)*
- 12 . *Also he ate largely and quickly and voraciously (p. 9)*
- 13 . *It appeared he was Cornish by birth and upbringing. (p. 9)*
- 14 . *'Yes, but there won't be any demand for women land-workers now the war's over,' said the youth. (p.9)*
- 15 . *For the youth, sitting before the fire in his uniform, sent a faint but distinct odour into the room, indefinable, but something like a wild creature. (p. 12)*

16 . Banford flew into the village on her bicycle to try and buy food. She was a hospitable soul. But alas, in the year 1918 there was not much food to buy. (p. 12)

17 . 'Well'--he hesitated--'at the "Swan" they've got this flu, and at the "Plough and Harrow" they've got the soldiers who are collecting the hay for the army: besides, in the private houses, there's ten men and a corporal altogether billeted in the village, they tell me. I'm not sure where I could get a bed.' (p. 13)

18 . He was a huntsman in spirit, not a farmer, and not a soldier stuck in a regiment. And it was as a young hunter that he wanted to bring down March as his quarry, to make her his wife. (p. 17)

19 . And suddenly it seemed to him England was little and tight, he felt the landscape was constricted even in the dark, and that there were too many dogs in the night, making a noise like a fence of sound, like the network of English hedges netting the view. He felt the fox didn't have a chance. For it must be the fox that had started all this hullabaloo. (p. 29)

20 . So she saw him off in the train that was going West: his camp was on Salisbury Plain. (p. 35)

21 . With this one fixed idea in his mind, he went to ask for twenty-four hours' leave of absence. (p. 47)

22 . In that great camp of wooden huts and tents he had no idea where his captain was. (p.47)

23 . 'May I speak to Captain Berryman?' The captain was Cornish like himself. (p. 47)

24 . He was gone. The captain, upset, took a gin and bitters. Henry managed to hire a bicycle. It was twelve o'clock when he left the camp. He had sixty miles of wet and muddy crossroads to ride. But he was in the saddle and down the road without a thought of food. (p. 48)

Only after gathering all the textual references, the reader is able to find out the perception of the war conveyed by the short story. Therefore, the second step of our work consisted in interpreting the data collected and in finding out a summary of the main points.

### **Interpretation of the data collected**

Everyday life living conditions during the war in the countryside (Berkshire, England)

- misery
- lack of food and limitations in the use of electricity
- lack of protection and security
- fear

Life at the frontline

- hardship of life
- young age of most soldiers

### **THE ROLE OF WOMEN DURING THE CONFLICT**

As regards the role of women during the First World War, data collection has not been necessary since the theme is deepened by the writer over the whole narration. Not only Lawrence chose two women as protagonists, he also told the story from a female point of view and namely March's. To tell the truth one must highlight March and Banford are not common ladies: they were not compelled to run a farm on their own leaving men out of their property, but they deliberately chose it. Therefore the reader is brought to reflect on the relationship between the female and

the male gender and the point is actually the object of Lawrence's study. As I will explain later, the whole story relies on the relationship between male and female. In conclusion, the reader might recap the main points as follows:

### **The role of women**

- need of independence and autonomy
- difficulties to face every day life
- absence of men (strength, support for the family, feelings)
- search for freedom

## **B. MY PERSONAL INTERPRETATION OF D. H. LAWRENCE'S THE FOX**

In my opinion, the deepest message conveyed by the short story *The Fox*, is that life is a continuous challenge, a conflict against the obstacles placed by destiny on your road. I have come to such conclusion, analyzing the short story from the structural point of view. Indeed, there are two main turning points in the story that allow the narrative machine to go on: the arrival of the fox and Henry's entrance into the two women's life. First of all, it is important to highlight that both "disturbing" elements are male figures that break the balance between March and Banford.

The short story starts from a balanced situation where March and Banford are trying to live on their own, to be autonomous and self-reliant. Reaching independence might be considered the two ladies' aim, and it metaphorically stands for the personal purpose everyone tries to reach in his/her life.

Right from the start, the road towards independence presents many obstacles. They have to face daily concrete problems but also relational difficulties deriving from the absence of men. However, at the beginning, there is still an intimate balance between March and Banford, until a fox starts to kill their hens.

The arrival of the fox is the first crucial turning point. On the denotative level, the fox is a wild predator that threatens the two ladies' safety. It is a concrete danger that represents one of the many obstacles of life you have to overcome. But in the conflict against the fox, the two ladies are beaten: they try to kill the animal but they cannot manage. D.H. Lawrence wants to convey the message that is not always possible to overcome a problem, but what matters is never give up. Furthermore, on the metaphorical level, the fox stands for the male gender embodied by Henry, the soldier.

Henry's arrival marks the second turning point. Initially Henry seems to be the solution to the two women's problems. Henry starts helping the two women doing hard work, and, above all, he manages to kill the fox. But to tell the truth Henry is just taking the place of the fox thus becoming a further obstacle on the women's road. On the metaphorical level, Henry represents a more dangerous and a slyer predator, whose favourite prey is March. He breaks the balance between the ladies, asking, or better imposing, March to marry him. Once again the women's harmony is threatened on the relational level. And once again they are beaten: Banford dies because of a fallen tree and March finally accepts to marry Henry renouncing to her desire of autonomy. It is important to underline that, even if the victim of the story seems to be Banford, actually the real victim is March. Indeed, considering the thread of narration, that is the road towards

independence, the reader gradually understands that Banford never desisted from pursuing her aim and therefore paying with her life. On the contrary, March renounced her desire of freedom, finally wondering whether she will ever be happy.

In conclusion, *The Fox* is the story of two women's challenge for autonomy. It turns out to be a great failure, but there is the meaning of literature: to tell about reality and to make people reflect on what life may really mean.

### C. COMPARISON

It is possible to find a strict relation between my personal interpretation of Lawrence's *The Fox* and the analysis carried out in class.

First of all, war might be interpreted as an obstacle that has to be overcome. In the short story, war is both external (the real conflict fought at the frontline) and internal (the relational contrast between the male and the female gender). Therefore, war might be a metaphor for each conflict you have to fight in order to reach your aim. Since such conflict is the two women's, a reflection on the role of women is necessary to understand the meaning of war. The war fought by the soldiers metaphorically becomes the war fought by women for emancipation and freedom. That is why I interpret *The Fox* as an invitation to fight for your ideals, to follow your road, but also as a realistic portrayal of life with all its difficulties, contradictions and failures.